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## **FOREWORD**

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 19 and 20, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Oquirrh Hills Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Norma Villar is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Oquirrh Hills Middle School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Oquirrh Hills Middle School.

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Kerrie Naylor .....Executive Director/West Central Area

# OQUIRRH HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

### School Administration

G. Norma Villar ..... Principal  
Douglas F. Graham ..... Assistant Principal  
James P. Marsh ..... Assistant Principal

### Counseling

Robert Book ..... School Psychologist  
Brian De Vries ..... Guidance Counselor  
Sherry Shirley ..... Guidance Counselor

### Support Staff

### Faculty

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Katharine Byerline	Tawny Hawkins	Dave Schmidt
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Matt Dietz	Leonard Howell	Becky Stephens
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Elizabeth Faller	Lon Littell	Janice Wuckert
Diane Ferrin	Cynthia M. Melenson	
Marcia Field	Todd S. Monson	

## **OQUIRRH HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Oquirrh Hills Middle School is committed to mutual respect, a safe learning environment, and educational excellence as we strive to prepare our students for success and instill a desire for life-long learning.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- That all students should have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed.
- That our school provides a well-rounded education for future success and life long learning.
- That education should prepare students with life skills to become responsible citizens with strong work ethics.
- That teachers possess diverse teaching styles and strategies that can influence students' lives in a positive way through their interactions with students.
- That mutual respect among teachers, students, administration, and parents is vital to a caring and nurturing learning environment.
- That classroom climate should contribute to a student's right to learn, a parent's right to be informed, and a teacher's right to teach.
- That education is the responsibility of parents, teachers, and students.
- That collaboration increases the likelihood of student success.
- That education continues to evolve, and educators and parents must stay abreast of those changes.
- That community involvement in the educational process strengthens the school.
- That our school and community, working together, should provide a safe learning environment, a positive partnership, and a continued commitment to educational excellence.

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Lori Gardner, Eisenhower Junior High School, Granite School District,  
Visiting Team Chairperson

Bill Grilz, South Ogden Junior High School, Weber School District

Mary Johnston, South Ogden Junior High School, Weber School District

Gregg Roberts, Churchill Junior High School, Granite School District

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**  
**OQUIRRH HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

The profile of Oquirrh Hills Middle School was a study of the school's role in the community, programs offered by the school, and included a wide range of data. Oquirrh Hills Middle School is located in Jordan District. The school currently serves 1184 in grades 7-9. The school is 22 years old. Norma Villar began her tenure as principal in 2000. Assistant Principals, Douglas Graham, and James March, were appointed to Oquirrh Hills in the summer of 2002. Twenty-five out of forty seven teachers have been teaching at the school less than three years. Four teachers have been at the school since its opening. The school has two counselors and a full-time psychologist. The school serves a community that is rapidly developing from an agrarian region to a fully developed suburban area

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of their profile?*

Oquirrh Hills Middle School began at the self-study process in 2001. The school's profile focuses primarily on standardized test data (Stanford Achievement Test, Criterion Referenced Tests). Oquirrh Hills Middle School students scored above district and national norms in science and math. While math and science SAT scores are strong, the faculty has identified critical academic needs in math due to the fact that 42% of students scored in the minimal or partial mastery categories on CRT's.

SAT and CRT tests indicate declining scores in Reading and Language Arts. Scores are below district average. The school has developed programs to address this issue such as a *Silent Sustained Reading* time daily. It has also begun a school-wide effort to train teachers in Six Trait Writing and the implementation of writing across the curriculum.

School officials indicate that daily school attendance is high. While this is not confirmed in the profile, the school has tracked the number of dropouts for the past three years. The number of dropout students is quite low, however, it has almost doubled yearly.

Student and community demographic data reveals the school serves a stable middle-class community. Ethnic diversity is very low with the percentage of racial ethnic groups 3.4% of the population. While fourteen of the teachers have ESL endorsements, the ESL population consists of only 15 students.

Stakeholder questionnaires were distributed to teachers, students, and parents. Disaggregated data indicates that all three groups responded favorably in the areas of discipline, safety, communication, and academics. The school determined that communication is of greatest concern to parents. Teachers also perceived communication to be an issue, as well as students' safety in common areas and before and after school. Student responses raised significant issues for the faculty. Concern was raised regarding their perceptions of respect between adult and student, as well as student to student.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

Oquirrh Hills Middle School should continue their efforts to systematically collect and analyze pertinent data to guide decisions made by the school. The visiting team suggests that Oquirrh Hills Middle School conducts a thorough study of student learning to determine who is succeeding, and who is not. Data needs to be routinely shared and used in the continuing effort to impact student achievement.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The analysis of course grades, attendance, and discipline patterns should be incorporated into the school's comprehensive profile in the future.
- The staff should consider participating in an examination of the data within each department. This should include a study of instructional and assessment strategies used, grading standards, and the application of the DRSL rubrics. This information would allow each department and teacher to identify performance goals and standards.
- The school has recognized the need to disaggregate standardized testing data to identify individual students who are not learning. It is suggested that this information be part of teachers' collaborative discussion on school-wide efforts to promote student success.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

In 2001, the Administration of Oquirrh Hills Middle School invited selected staff members, students and parents to serve on the Accreditation Committee. Staff members were chosen to represent all departmental areas. The Accreditation

Committee sent representatives to Leadership and Visiting Team training sponsored by USOE. The committee then began meeting monthly to develop surveys, compile data, and develop the school profile. Surveys were completed by 976 students, 45 staff members, and 124 parents.

As the school profile was being developed, information would be regularly shared during monthly faculty and department meetings and through the school newsletter. All stakeholders were invited to make comment or solicit information.

The Visiting Team commends the commitment of the Accreditation Committee to take a critical look at the school and the needs of its students.

b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The Oquirrh Hills Middle School self study does an effective job defining the community and student clientele. It shows the stability and homogeneity of the community. Data regarding student achievement is almost entirely focused on that derived from standardized testing. It accurately reflects the student achievement in comparison with state and district norms.

The surveys provide valuable information regarding school climate and community support. There is general consensus on the part of staff, parents, and students, that Oquirrh Hills Middle School is a “good” school. The surveys provide information that the staff can use as it develops and implements its action plan, such as the need for more effective communication between staff and administration, and between the community and the school.

The self-study does not delve deep enough into issues regarding teaching and learning, and overall student behavior and performance. It fails to give a clear picture of those that might be “falling through the cracks.” For purposes of aligning the school’s mission and beliefs to an effective action plan, the school needs to engage in further research. It is recommended that the Accreditation Committee explore data concerning student behavior. The committee also needs to do a comprehensive study of teachers’ instructional and assessment practices to determine overall effectiveness and areas of need of professional development as it relates to the school’s *Desired Results for Student Learning* and the implementation of the action plan.

## **CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Oquirrh Hills Middle School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Character Development
  - Responsibility to Self
  - Responsibility to Others
  - Responsibility to School and Community
  
2. Critical Thinking
  - Students will identify questions, issues, tasks and problems.
  - Students will know how to access information.
  - Students will effectively evaluate the credibility of sources.
  - Students will organize and classify information.
  - Students will analyze collected information.
  - Students will evaluate information in order to reach a conclusion.
  - Students will conduct self-evaluations to conclude if issues, tasks, or problems have been solved.
  
3. Effective Communication
  - Students demonstrate effective listening skills
  - Students will present ideas effectively through written methods with clarity, purpose, and understanding of audience.
  - Students will present ideas effectively through oral interaction with clarity, purpose, and understanding of audience.
  - Students have the ability to read and comprehend the written word.
  - Students will value reading for enjoyment.
  
4. Life-Long Learning
  - Students will explore opportunities for future career choices.
  - Student will make a commitment to understand lesson objectives and complete quality work.
  - Students will connect knowledge and experience from different subject areas, and will seek challenging tasks and learning opportunities in school and outside of the school environment.

### **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

The Administration has established an Accreditation Committee that is representative of all stakeholders in the school. At every step in the accreditation process, staff and parents were informed and invited to make comment. Given the fact that over half of the faculty is new to the school within two or three years, much has been done to build a shared vision.

However, because several teachers chose either to be little or not at all involved in the process, the vision for the school is clearly not shared by all. The Visiting Team was impressed with the degree to which the Administration had worked to publish the school's mission and *Desired Results for Student Learning*, although now it must work to weave the mission, beliefs and DRSLs into the daily operation and activities of the school. It is recommended that, as the school implements its action plan, attention be given to the degree to which faculty members can opt out of the discussion and process.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The Oquirrh Hills Middle School Belief Statements clearly reflect the intent of the administration and staff to provide every student with a quality educational experience. They acknowledge the individual strengths and needs of students and staff members. The statements define the importance of the community and school working together, and the responsibility of all stakeholders to be involved in the school.

The Oquirrh Hills Middle School Belief Statements are written to foster attitudes of respect, responsibility, and life-long learning.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

There is a clear alignment of the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs. The mission, beliefs, and DRSLs reflect the school's commitment to providing a quality education for its students that lends to future educational success, as well as serving to assist students' development as contributive members of a democratic society.

### **Curriculum Development:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure that the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

Upon interviewing the staff and leadership teams, the visiting team found strong evidence that curriculum is clearly defined and aligned with both the district

standards and the State Core. Some collaboration between departments has taken place to integrate Core concepts, but it is done more informally than formal. Essential knowledge and skills in most content areas are identified and are usually developed into the curriculum. There is limited evidence that the curriculum development process takes into account the learning needs of students. Moving forward with teaming and other effective middle level practices will support the desired focus on essential concepts while meeting the needs of individual students.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The Visiting Team recognizes that faculty and staff members are working to promote a collaborative culture at Oquirrh Hills Middle School. Although a conscious effort has been made to reach out to every staff member through school-wide discussions, all staff members could not articulate a clear academic focus. Several members reported attending few if any of the optional meetings. The leadership team attempted to develop DRSLs based on the consensus of the entire faculty, but because participation was optional, there is not yet sufficient consensus or commitment to implement school-wide. Therefore, increasing school-wide understanding of criteria for selecting the DRSLs will enable the school community to have a clearer focus for curriculum and instruction.

As a result of the staff's clear commitment to education, it is evident that teachers are beginning to collaborate to initiate programs to benefit student success. Certainly the beginning stages of school-wide focus (i.e., reading/writing across the curriculum, Big Six training) are emerging and have been formalized into the school's Strategic Plan.

It is recommended that the school *as a whole* reexamine the NSSE rubrics to identify where they are and what is needed to successfully implement their action plan.

Some teachers also expressed concern about the lack of textbooks and other curriculum materials, and having access to new technology. The Visiting Team recommends that the administration consider the needs of all departments and develop a plan to equitably distribute resources.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

During classroom visits the team observed multiple teaching strategies, including hands on activities, oral reports, small group work, lectures, writing to learn, re-told stories, and class discussion. Student and parent interviews indicated that they are satisfied with the quality of instructional at Oquirrh Hills Middle School. The team has observed the faculty to be hardworking, dedicated, and available to students and parents. However, the faculty should coordinate key concepts between departments. The establishment of a stronger interdepartmental professional development program for all teachers, regardless of department, should be implemented and supported. An emphasis on better teaming practices is highly recommended. The school action plan outlines a process of reducing the number of minimal and partial mastery students in Math and Language Arts/Reading by 1% each year over the next 5 years as measured by the CRTs. To achieve this desired goal a shared commitment by all departments must be undertaken.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

Oquirrh Hills Middle School has a special education department with well-trained instructors, but a greater focus needs to be placed on coordinating efforts to assist students in both pullout and mainstream settings in an effort to meet the needs of different learners. The visiting team was unable to collect evidence indicating the extent to which individual teachers monitor and adjust their instruction to address the different ability levels from gifted to at-risk found within a regular classroom setting. A close self-evaluation concerning differentiated instruction might help the school address this concern.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Students and parents reported that many teachers are available before and after school, and are happy to provide help with assignments or difficult concepts. Additionally, there is an organized after-school tutoring program provided by teachers whereby any student interested has the opportunity to receive additional assistance. As per teacher and student input, Oquirrh Hills Middle School provides students with many opportunities to improve and enrich their learning experience. Opportunities include: Debate, Science Olympiad, Foreign Language Week, Mock Trials, Spelling Bee, Constitution Bowl, Math Counts, History Fair, Work-Based Learning, concert and plays taken to neighboring elementary schools, and after-school sports.

### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or schoolwide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The *Desired Results for Student Learning* seek to define common expectations for student achievement. Where expectations are clearly understood and accepted by staff, student, and parents, results will be evident. While most teachers reported that they used alternative assessments, the Visiting Team did not see evidence of alternative assessments being used on a widespread scale to determine student success. The school used standardized testing as their basis for defining student achievement levels. An effort has been made to define the type of achievement the staff wants to assess and the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students' achievement. The staff will want to take the school-wide standards of measurement (rubrics) and implement them across the curriculum. Disaggregating the data will provide additional information on individual student progress.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

As in most schools, the development of assessments is based on a department or classroom level rather than on a school-wide basis. However, ongoing efforts to create school-wide assessments will provide valuable data on student achievement. There is evidence of the use of performance assessments in some classes. In order for the *Desired Results for Student Learning* to have impact for all students, the development of school-wide performance assessments is critical. Implementing an action plan that is driven by the *DRSLs* will help facilitate school-wide assessment. It is recommended that conversations among staff, parents, and students, be expanded to further explore who is learning and who is not; as information gained will also help shape effective assessment methods.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

Though the Visiting Team has no reason to doubt the fairness and equity in the use of assessments at Oquirrh Hills Middle School, no personal observations were made, or report contents found, to support or contradict this perception. In interviews, it was stated that ESL and Special Education students were given special accommodations in all areas; we assume this means accommodations in standardized testing and classroom assessments. There is a strong desire by the staff to receive timely and accurate data in order to better serve the needs of all students. The staff understands that using the data leads them to better instructional decisions. The Language Arts department shared some concerns on how the end-of-level tests were administered, feeling that scores were low due to the administration of the test, rather than based on student knowledge and understanding of the concepts. It is recommended that Oquirrh Hills Middle School review school-wide testing procedures to ensure that all students are given optimal conditions in which to succeed.

## **Leadership for School Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The Administration clearly has as its priority student success. It has worked diligently to promote best practices and to provide teachers with the training and skills they need to work effectively with students. The leadership of the school, teachers along with administrators, makes a concerted effort to allocate resources of time, money, and training to implement effective staff development. Teachers are encouraged to further their education and training and opportunities are provided on site.

The recent history of relationships between administrators and staff has required the current Administration to pay a great deal of attention to forming collaborative relationships. The Visiting Team commends the Oquirrh Hills Middle School Administration for the work they have done to develop leadership capacity within the staff and encourages them to continue to bring in those who might feel left out of the decision-making process.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

As is the case in most schools in the state of Utah, Oquirrh Hills Middle School is struggling with the need for accurate data that is easily retrievable. The school has begun using a new data retrieval system that will provide accurate information regarding student attendance and behavior. This will provide data to better inform decision-making.

Based on CRT test information, the staff implemented a school-wide reading period and has embarked on the implementation of the Six Trait Writing Strategies across the curriculum. These decisions represent the collaborative effort of the staff to look at student needs and develop a plan of action.

The Visiting Team recommends the possible establishment of a committee that could help lead the staff in studying effective middle level practice. Administrators and teachers should be encouraged to attend workshops specifically focused on the needs of young adolescents.

- c) *To what extent does leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

While Oquirrh Hills Middle School staff should be commended for the degree to which it is starting to use data to monitor student progress and program

effectiveness, the Visiting Team recommends that formal training be given to the staff in data-driven decision-making. The school has done an excellent job in providing opportunities for students to receive tutorial help or engage in enrichment activities, however, many students and parents remain frustrated that not enough is done in many classrooms to ensure mastery of concepts.

The Visiting Team recommends a thorough study be done to ascertain instructional effectiveness. This could consist of shadow surveys, focus groups, and the use of peer coaching.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

Principal Villar has worked to promote a safe and effective learning environment. Upon touring the building, the Visiting Team was impressed with the degree to which she has focused resources to promote a positive learning environment. The school is clean and orderly, the adults in the building demonstrate pride in their work and a commitment to helping students feel safe and secure. Teachers and parents commend the administration for their attention to discipline and to the degree to which they work to promote positive behavior in students.

School leadership has developed programs such as Peer Mediation, RESPECT, and Tutoring to assist students academically and socially. Many opportunities are provided for learning enrichment and remediation. Parents are provided multiple opportunities to be involved in their student's education.

While Oquirrh Hills Middle School appears to maintain a safe and positive environment, concern has been raised regarding the number of students who are tardy or are unsupervised in the hallways during class time. Students reported parts of the building were hazardous to walk through due to crowd situations. The Visiting Team observed dozens of students during each class break wandering the building with no sense of urgency to get to class. It is recommended that the school leadership assess the scope of the problem and investigate effective strategies to help curb tardiness.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

School leadership has been focused on driving the school forward towards the articulation of school goals, the identification of DRSLs common to all academic areas, and the development of a school-wide action plan. Through the leadership's efforts the DRSLs are becoming part of the common language of the school. School improvement efforts such as implementation of a school-wide reading time, training all staff in Big Six Strategies, and the Six Traits of Writing

are helping teachers align curriculum and instruction with the school goals. It is clear that this effort has not been for the sole purpose of accreditation, but has become part of the culture of the school.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The school leadership has worked to empower stakeholders to become decision-makers in the school improvement process. Teacher leaders were selected and all faculty and staff were invited to participate on focus group committees. Students and parents also played important roles on accreditation committees. However, because participation was voluntary, many of the staff were involved on a limited basis and a few have expressed that decisions were made for the entire school without consensus.

It is strongly recommended that as the school reviews its self-study and acts to implement the action plan, contract time be used throughout the year for the purpose of discussion and decision-making. The Visiting Team believes that by creating time for collaboration on the implementation of the action plan within the contractual time of teachers, fewer will be able to opt-out of their responsibility to the school's efforts and greater buy in will be achieved.

### **Community Building:**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

Oquirrh Hills Middle School makes an ongoing effort to foster community building and working relationships within the school. The school continues to create and sustain a learning environment for students that nurture a sense of caring and belonging. Positive and productive working relationships have been established among students, teachers, support staff, and administration. The Visiting team encourages the staff to continue the process of collaboration across departments to foster collegiality and to provide cross-curricular connections for students.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

Stakeholders at the school level engage in well-planned collaborative networks. School networks involve students with Primary Children's Hospital, Riverton Public Library, local parks, and the Children's Justice Center.

Other collaborative efforts are evidenced through the work of the Community Council, PTSA, school newsletter, SEOP Conferences, PowerSchool and PowerGrade. It is recommended that the school community continue to work to involve more parents in volunteer and decision-making efforts in the school.

**Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Oquirrh Hills Middle School clearly has a commitment to professional development. Staff development meetings are held regularly to assess progress, find solutions, present new programs, and review teaching strategies. Guest speakers are invited to staff development meetings to present instruction for continuous improvement and learning. Administration meets with teachers and departments to share ideas about curriculum and instruction. Teachers are encouraged to attend workshops and inservice by the Administration.

As part of the school's action plan, it is recommended that a professional development component be developed that provides a yearlong focus for professional learning. Training should include regular information sessions along with opportunities for teachers to implement what they have learned and share the effects with colleagues.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The Visiting Team believes that the leadership in the school is supportive of the staff and the faculty appreciates the hard work, effort, and dedication of the Administration. Staff members meet once a month for collaboration and faculty meetings. Individual departments meet monthly and share information with the Administration via written summary.

The Visiting Team commends the effort of all staff members. The Visiting Team recommends that department meetings be held at a regular time each month with an Administrator present and an agenda which focuses on the school's action plan. The importance of inter- and intra-departmental collaboration cannot be stressed enough to provide optimal student success.

**CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND OF  
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (NASCU)  
STANDARDS I-X**

These standards are not applicable to junior high or middle schools.

**CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN**

- a) *To what extent is the schoolwide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The school's action plan was derived from the work of the focus groups. Focus groups submitted their action plans to the Accreditation Committee based on the work they did analyzing school strengths and deficiencies. The focus group plans were synthesized into a comprehensive school plan and then disseminated back to the focus groups for revision and editing.

As identified by a review of school data, language arts and math are specific areas of concern. Oquirrh Hills Middle School has developed a plan to help teachers gain the skills needed to effectively assist students through professional development. However, while the plan outlines staff development and awareness efforts, little attention is given to steps needed to ensure training impacts student learning. Specifically, Action Plans 1 and 2, dealing with literacy and numeracy, focus on professional development to enhance teachers understanding of the Six Traits of Writing, Content Reading Strategies, and the Big Six Method of Research. However, the plan for ensuring that training impacts instruction and classroom practice is vague. Attention needs to be given to what each teacher needs to know and *be able to do* in order to enhance students' literacy and math skills.

While the action plans address concerns identified in the school profile, it fails to directly incorporate the DRSLs. The Visiting Team believes that as the school completes the self-study and collaborative process, plan components will be developed to more closely align with the school's defined DRSLs.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, schoolwide and systemwide?*

There is a commitment at the school to the process of self-inspection and improvement. However, the Visiting team recognizes that not all stakeholders are aware of the process, the DRSLs, the focus groups and directions, and the action plan. The Accreditation Committee acknowledges that time and effort still needs

to be given to ensure that the action plan accurately defines school needs and focus for all school programs and decisions. While several of the departmental reports alluded the DRSLs, it is not clear that everyone understands the next steps that need to be taken to ensure curriculum and instruction are aligned with the DRSLs. Just as students could recite the four categories of the DRSLs, so too did department members report that they were addressing them. However, when asked, few could give specifics as to how instruction and assessment has changed in their classrooms to ensure students were mastering the DRSLs.

c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?*

The Visiting Team commends the staff and administration for recognizing that on-going professional learning is integral to successful change. The school's action plans provide a comprehensive schedule of learning activities for all of the staff. That being said, the school should reassess the professional learning needs of the staff to ensure that adequate time is given for learning, practice, application, and reflection. As they review the action plans, attention should be given to the types of data and assessment needed to gauge implementation efforts. As the staff reviews the types of data needed to fully understand the needs of their students, it will become clearer to identify strategies needed to assess the impact of the DRSLs on student success.

It is recommended that the school develop a portfolio to illustrate the school's efforts and to provide orientation to new staff members, parents, and other stakeholders.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- Oquirrh Hills Middle School is to be commended for the degree to which they have worked to build a cohesive, collaborative faculty. It is clear that the administration and staff have made a concerted, sincere effort to engage in the continuous improvement process.
- Oquirrh Hills Middle School is one committed to the needs of students. Teachers and administrators work to create a safe and caring environment. Improvements over the last few years have been considerable, and are indicative of a strong commitment to best serve the community.

- As the faculty, staff, and administration have engaged in the accreditation process, they have worked to involve all stakeholders and have encouraged open and honest dialogue. The Visiting Team commends the school for inviting students and parents so fully into the discussions and for truly valuing their opinions. Efforts taken to ensure that everyone had opportunity to voice comments and make suggestions have strengthened commitment to the action plans.

### **Recommendations:**

- It is recommended that the school revisit the development of the school profile to provide greater in-depth information regarding student success and failure, behavior patterns, and teacher effectiveness. This can be incorporated into the work of the action plans as teachers evaluate student work to determine the impact of professional learning.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty and administration implement best middle level practice. Providing smaller learning communities (teams), integrated and relevant curriculum, and effective strategies for teaching young adolescents will enhance the success of every student.
- Identified as a need by all stakeholders, effective communication must remain a priority. All teachers need to engage fully in the reform process with meetings and professional learning opportunities scheduled on contract time. The school needs to continue to work to engage more parents in school activities and to fully inform them of the school's mission and goals for its students.
- Now that the staff and administration have put considerable time, effort, and resources into the development of DRSLs, and action plans, the reform effort must continue. Attention needs to be centered on clearly developing consensus on what students need to know and be able to do. Departments need to develop strategies and timelines in accordance with the school-wide action plans, and ways of assessing student and professional growth need to be more clearly defined. The school has a plan; now the challenge comes in working it successfully.